



## NEWS RELEASE

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## Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office Honors Three Heroes for Courageous Acts

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office today honored three people for their courage in stepping up in the face of danger and helping to keep our community safe from violent crime.

The honorees included a Valencia man who came to the aid of a woman who was beaten by her boyfriend and forced to panhandle for money while her children were being held hostage at gunpoint; a woman whose testimony inside a Van Nuys courtroom strengthened the criminal case against a serial rapist and helped other victims secure justice; and a bus driver who helped stop the abduction of a girl from her mother and sister at a Lancaster bus station.

"The bravery demonstrated by these heroes reminds me that we all have the potential to step up and do what's right," District Attorney Lacey said. "I am proud of these remarkable individuals who helped my deputy district attorneys make our community safer by prosecuting violent crime against innocent victims."

The honorees were recognized this afternoon at a Courageous Citizen Awards ceremony. It was hosted by the Kiwanis Club of Northridge.

The Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office presents these awards several times a year to people who have performed extraordinary acts of valor and selflessness in assisting in criminal prosecutions, aiding victims, preventing crimes or even capturing suspects.

Awards were presented to:

**Brian Zeringue, 45, of Valencia (Case no. BA467774, presented by Deputy District Attorney Tal Kahana)**

Mr. Brian Zeringue came to the aid of a woman and her children. On May 1, 2018, the children's father beat and threatened to kill their mother, then drove them to Castaic and hours later to a Lancaster Starbucks. The man held the children hostage at gunpoint while he forced the woman to panhandle for

gas money. Mr. Zeringue heard the woman's quiet pleas for help and called 911, launching a 10-hour pursuit and standoff with authorities. His actions led to the safe release of the children and the man's felony conviction.

On Aug. 19, a jury found the defendant guilty of 12 felony counts, including kidnapping; injuring a spouse, cohabitant, fiancé, boyfriend, girlfriend or child's parent; and assault with a firearm, and one misdemeanor count of failure to register as a transient with a prior sex offense. The defendant was sentenced Sept. 4 to 88 years and four months in state prison. The case was investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

**Bianca Guerra, 31, of San Diego (Case no. LA085808, presented by Deputy District Attorney David Nary)**

When deputy district attorneys were faced with a difficult case against a serial rapist, they called upon Ms. Bianca Guerra, who years before testified against the same man, to ensure that a dangerous predator would once again be taken out of our community. Ms. Guerra took public transportation from East Los Angeles to the Van Nuys Courthouse for several days to bravely testify against the man who was convicted of raping her more than a decade earlier. Through her testimony, she helped prosecutors secure justice for the man's victims and made our community safer by returning her assailant to state prison.

On April 23, a jury found the defendant guilty of felony counts of kidnapping to commit a sexual assault, sexual battery by restraint, forcible rape, assault with intent to commit a sexual crime and attempted forcible rape. On June 6, he was sentenced to 81 years to life in state prison. The case was investigated by the Los Angeles Police Department.

**Latasha Gillespie, 41, of Palmdale (Case no. MA072577, presented by Deputy District Attorney Diane Hong)**

Ms. Latasha Gillespie, a bus driver who was on a break, heard a woman scream and responded, helping to stop the attempted kidnapping of a girl at a Lancaster bus station on Nov. 5, 2017. Ms. Gillespie saw a woman struggling with a man, who minutes earlier had walked up to the bus stop, exchanged words with the woman and threatened to abduct her daughters. Ms. Gillespie helped rescue the girl, then shielded her and her sister from the man. Her willingness to testify in court led him to plead no contest to crimes carrying a significant prison sentence.

On Oct. 24, 2018, the defendant pleaded no contest to two felony counts each of false imprisonment and assault by means of force likely to produce great bodily injury. The defendant was sentenced Nov. 8, 2018, to 21 years and four months in state prison. The case was investigated by the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

**[About the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office](#)**

Los Angeles County District Attorney Jackie Lacey leads the largest local prosecutorial office in the nation. Her staff of nearly 1,000 attorneys, 300 investigators and 800 support staff members is dedicated to protecting our community through the fair and ethical pursuit of justice and the safeguarding of crime victims' rights.